Jim Schuyler, Virginia Community Action Partnership

Issue raised by Community Action Head Start providers:

We are hearing from a number of community action Head Start providers that there is competition between Virginia Pre-School Initiative and Head Start for children to fill slots. One Head Start provider has told me that his agency will apply to HHS for a reduction in slots because HS-eligible children are being served by VPI.   Another Head Start provider said that VPI has been enrolling four year old children who were served by Head Start at age three. This is a particular problem in areas of the state where there are declining enrollments (i.e. rural areas). This means that certain programs are losing federal dollars for Head Start as the number of classrooms are reduced.

In some jurisdictions, the local VPI/Head Start Collaboration Committee works well and they have developed a "single point of entry" application. A committee with representatives of HS and VPI screen the applications and children are placed according to their needs and income eligibility. At the same time, local schools are concerned about losing their VPI funding if they do not fill their classrooms. A few areas have "blended classrooms" for four year olds—otherwise, some HS providers are concerned that there will not be enough four year olds to fill both programs. HS providers are concerned that no one is enforcing the rule that VPI should be serving children not being served by the HS program.

I have heard that the issue of recruiting and enrolling four year olds for HS is a national concern as well. Many HS programs have had difficulty enrolling four year olds due to the increase in state and local pre-K options. Competition for four year olds strains recruitment resources and makes it more difficult to serve three year olds due to ratio and staffing.

In other parts of the state, there are waiting lists for children who are seeking to be enrolled in the local HS program. Where there is a collaboration agreement that is adhered to and when a single point of entry application has been developed, there are fewer problems with competition.